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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted at a Canadian suicide prevention center. The object of the study was to find useful information concerning high school students in the perspective of developing a suicide prevention program in the schools. All 23 local high schools contributed to this study on suicidal ideation and behavior. Subjects (N=2,546) responded to questionnaires on suicidal ideation, adolescent-parent relationships, and a possible chaotic family life. The student sample was divided into three groups. The suicidal group included those students who had tried to commit suicide as well as those who had seriously planned their suicide. The borderline cases included students who had undertaken serious planning but had not thought about suicide at least three times in their lifetimes. The non-suicidal group consisted of students who had never thought of suicide. The results indicated that 7.2% of the students between ages 14 to 19 had already tried to commit suicide and 12.3% had seriously thought about it. It was statistically significant that as the parental attitude toward the child deteriorates, the proportion of suicidal adolescents increased. The proportion of suicidal adolescent behavior was more significant in those families in which the two parents were not living together. The proportion of suicidal adolescents was more significant in households in which parental harmony was considered bad. (ABL)

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FAMILY FACTORS AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR

American Association of Suicidology

24th Annual Conference

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This research was conducted by the "Centre de Prévention du Suicide 02" (Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean-Chibougamau-Chapais region) in the province of Québec. The object of the study was to find usefull information concerning senior high school students in the perspective to develop a suicide prevention program in the schools. This paper will focus its attention on the family factors contributing to a better understanding of potential suicidal behavior of adolescents.

Problem:

The teenage (15-19) suicidal rate in our region (19.0 deaths/100,000) is significantely higher than the provincial rate (15.2 deaths/100,000) for the period between 1985-1989 which is already one of the highest in North America. For these young people, suicide is the second leading cause of death, following motor vehicule accidents.

Methodology:

All the twenty-three local high schools contributed to this study on suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior. The sample consisted of 2,546 students out of an estimated population of 10,000. The survey reveals an error rate of 1.7% with an accuracy level of 95%.

The investigation tools used in the study were the suicidal ideation scale of Zung (1973), questions about adolescent-parent relationships from the Parental Bowding Instrument of Parker (1983), and the Bijulco, Harris and Brown scale to discover if the families of suicidal adolescents are more chaotic. These three instruments have been adapted in french by Tousignant, M., Bastien, M.-F., Hamel, S., from the LAREHS of the Université du Québec à Montréal.

We divided the student sample into three groups: The first group called the "Suicidal" included those students who had tried to commit suicide as well as those who had seriously planned their suicide. The second group, consisted of the "Borderline Cases" wich included those who had undertaken a serious planning but who had not thought about suicide at least three times in their lifetime; and/or on a two week period. Finally, the third group, the "Non-suicidal" consisted of students who had never seriously thought of committing suicide.

Results:

With regards to suicidal prevalence, we find that 7.2% of the students between 14 and 19 years old have already tried to commit suicide; 12.3% have seriously thought about it. Based on the definition illustrated above, 19.5% (7.2% + 12.3%) of our sample are suicidal, 4.3% are borderline cases while 76.2% are non-suicidal.

It is statistically significant that as the parental attitude towards the child deteriorates, the proportion of suicidal adolescents increases. Where the father is found to be negligent , the proportion of adolescent suicidal tendencies is 31.8%. When it is not the case, the proportion drops to 13.1%. On the other hand when the mother is negligent the percentage is 40.3% in comparison to 16% when she is not. However, it is necessary to underline the fact that the mother is less negligent than the father.

The proportion of suicidal adolescent behavior is more significant in those families where the two parents are not living together. In families where parents are separated or divorced, 28.1% of the

students are suicidal as compared to 18.1% in families where the mother and the father are living under the same roof.

In the situation where the two parents are living together, the adolescents have answered specific questions about family harmony which indicates the following results.

The proportion of adolescents who are suicidal is more significant in households where the parental harmony is considered bad. When the understanding between the parents is very good, 13.9% of the adolescents are suicidal; 25.1% when the understanding is good; 37% when it is bad and 50% when it is very bad.

Families in which parents never, or then again rarely argue, we find respectively 13.8% and 14% of the children are suicidal. Where the parents argue some times, or then again often, we find respectively 23.1% and 36.2% of the youth are considered suicidal.

Where the arguments between the parents takes place in front of the children, the percentage of youths with suicidal tendencies is 22.7%; and 39% when they are involved in their quarrels. When it is not the case, the proportion of suicidal tendencies are respectively 14.8% and 16.8%.

If the students consider their parents as being violent, we find 34.1% of the children are suicidal; 15.9% when it is not the case. In the case of a person having been hit, the percentage of suicidal adolescents is 37.5% comparatively to 16% when it is not the case. If somebody has been injured, the percentage of suicidal students is 42.9% in comparison to 17.2% when it is not the case.

Discussion:

With reference to other research projects conducted, we have realized the importance of a healthy family environnement to young adults. Despite the fact that the proportion of young suicidal adolescents is higher in families where the parents are not living together, this does not entirely explain the suicidal phenomenon of the 15-19 year old student population.

Family factors could be a better explanation for the high level of adolescent suicide, rather than simply looking at situations of separation and divorce. The proportion of suicidal adolescents is higher in families where parents are negligent. According to the students' perception we find that one out of two students consider that their father does not take the necessary time to discuss with them.

We find that the level of suicidal behavior is higher in families where the two parents are living together than in split families when the following occurs: the understanding between the two parents is bad or very bad; when the parents argue often; when the children are involved in their quarrels; when family violence takes place; when somebody has been hit and finally when somebody has been injured.

We can say that good relationships and family harmony would permit young adults to develop protection factors against serious suicidal ideations and behaviors in facing the normal crises of adolescent development.